

# INDIAN SEALS

(PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS)

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

**INDIAN SEALS**  
**(PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS)**

*Editor : K. D. Bhargava*



NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

*National Archives of India*

PUBLISHED BY THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA AND PRINTED  
IN INDIA BY THE MANAGER, GOVT. OF INDIA PRESS, FARIDABAD, 1960

## PREFACE

Among the primary sources of Indian history seals have not received the attention they deserve. No systematic work has been done on the subject so far and no steps have been taken for their preservation on scientific lines. In order to fill this lacuna the National Archives of India has embarked upon a new Project of Cataloguing the Oriental Seals found on original documents in its custody. This pioneering venture, which has been undertaken by the Oriental Records Division under the guidance of my colleague Shri A. I. Tirmizi, Assistant Director of Archives, will, it is hoped, open up new vistas of research.

Apart from the seals in the custody of this Department, quite a large number of them are found either in various official repositories of records or in private custody where they suffer from various forms of decay. If early steps are not taken to preserve them scientifically, it is feared that they will be lost to posterity, leaving a big gap in the history of our country. It is, therefore, necessary that those who are entrusted with the custody of seals should be conscious of their value and familiar with the methods of their preservation.

With the above object in view Shri Tirmizi contributed a series of two articles, viz., (1) A Saga of Indian Seals and (2) Problems of Sigillography in India. The

first article, which gives a general survey of Indian seals, was published in the *March of India*, July, 1959. The second dealing with the problems of Indian seals has been included in the *Indian Archives*, January—December, 1957. These articles serve not only as a pointer in that direction but provide the students of Indian sigillography with an essential tool for their task. In view of their importance and utility they are now reprinted in the form of a brochure.

Our thanks are due to the Director, Publications Division, Government of India, for permission to reproduce one of the articles which appeared in the *March of India*.

*National Archives of India,  
New Delhi,  
21 September, 1959.*

K. D. BHARGAVA  
*Director of Archives,  
Government of India.*

## CONTENTS

	Page
Preface . . . . .	iii
Contents . . . . .	v
List of Plates . . . . .	vii
A Saga of Indian Seals . . . . .	1
Problems of Sigillography in India . . . . .	12
Bibliography . . . . .	30

## LIST OF PLATES

PLATE I	No. 1.	Seal of Kantideva
	No. 2.	„ Rajindra Chola
PLATE II	No. 3.	„ Babur
	No. 4.	„ Nur Jahan
PLATE III	No. 5.	„ Shah Jahan
	No. 6.	„ Dara Shukoh
PLATE IV	No. 7.	„ Madhav Rao Narayan Peshwa
	No. 8.	„ Nana Farnavis
PLATE V	No. 9.	„ Kamaleshwari Devi
	No. 10.	„ Braja Nath Sinha
PLATE VI	No. 11.	„ Marquis of Hastings
	No. 12.	„ Lord Bentinck
PLATE VII	No. 13.	Pendant seal of R. Christian VIII.

## I

### A SAGA OF INDIAN SEALS

Of the few primary sources of Indian history, seals provide a fascinating subject of study. Right from the second millennium B.C., to which the Indus valley civilisation belongs, down to the British times seals have been used by kings, queens, princes, high-placed officers and private individuals as well as by governments and institutions to lend authority to documents and correspondence. In ancient and mediaeval India seal was considered even more important than signature for giving validity to a document. Although in modern times their importance has waned, seals continue to be used to give official contracts and communications authenticity and legal validity.

**Ancient Seals.**—The practice of using signet-rings emblematic of love, power and sovereignty can be traced back to remote antiquity. In Indian mythology Rama is reported to have sent his *anguliyakam* (signet-ring) incised with the letters of his name, to Sita. In the *Shakuntala*, Kalidasa has made a dexterous use of the signet-ring of king Dushyanta who having forgotten his wife, Shakuntala, recognised her only after his memory was evoked by the sight of the ring which he had given her, with his name engraved on it, as a token of love. The plot of Visakhadatta's *Mudra-rakshasa*



(Rakshasa's seal) hinges upon the signet-ring of Rakshasa, fugitive minister of the last Nanda king. Similarly we are told by Bana that when Harshavardhana was about to march against the king of Gauda the *gramakshapatalika* (keeper of the village records) requested the king to issue orders for the day and presented a golden *mudra* (matrix) having the device of a bull. When Hsuen Tsiang, the Chinese pilgrim, took leave of Harshavardhana, the latter furnished him with letters written on fine white cotton stuff and authenticated by impressions of his seal made of red wax.

Not only do we have references to the practice of using seals but actual specimens of ancient Indian matrices and signet-rings have come down to us. Seal-stamps bearing legends as well as devices were discovered at Harappa. While legends on them have not yet been deciphered, the devices which they bear have life-like pictures of animals like lion, tiger, elephant, bear, deer and bull. While these seal-stamps are unilingual one having its legend in three different characters—Brahmi, Kharoshti and Greek—has also survived. In the line of signet-rings we have an actual specimen made of copper or bronze ascribed to the fourth century of the Christian era. This signet-ring of Maharaja Mahesvaranaga, the son of Nagabhata, is oval in shape and has both legend and device sunk in the surface of the signet. We have not only the specimens of seal-matrices and signet-rings but seal-impressions also have been discovered. The early Indian seals are found on clay.

While Buddhist votive tablets are the best examples of inscribed tablets they cannot technically be called seals. But the clay tablets having either device or legend can be called clay-seals and various archaeological sites abound in them. A large collection of such seals referable to fourth and fifth centuries A.D., were found at Basarh in Muzaffarpur District. This collection consists of seals of officials, corporations, guilds, temples, private individuals etc. Besides clay, copper was also used for sealing purposes and such seals are found on *tamra-sasana* (copper-plate grants). They are of various sizes and shapes, *viz.*, circular, oval, leaf-shaped etc. The earlier copper seals are simple and contain an emblem or two, forming the royal insignia or the coat of arms. The principal device was *lanchhana* (crest) which was used on coins also. This usually took the form of a lion, a tiger, an elephant, a bull, a bear, a fish, a serpent, the bird-man Garuda, the monkey-god Hanuman etc. Besides such figures there are also engraved lamp-stands, *chhatra* (parasol), the sun and the crescent moon. The legend which is sometimes composed in verse contains the name of the ruler along with that of his father.

The seal of Kantideva (Pl. I—No. 1), which looks like an inverted leaf, is supported by two figures of serpents whose interlaced tails are soldered to the bottom of the seal while their hoods are raised. The seal proper is divided into two panels. While the lower panel bears the legend *Sri Kantideva*, the upper one bears the figure of a lion seated in a temple. But







Of the seals of the Mughal queens those of Hamida Banu Begum and Nur Jahan have come down to us. The seal of Hamida Banu is square and comprises three vertical panels, the middle one bearing her name in the upper and the lower ones having a Persian emblem each. The lower panel has the year 968 A H (1561 A D) engraved on it. This date is of great significance inasmuch as it coincides with the death of Akbar Khan. The seal of Nur Jahan (P. II No. 4) is more beautiful and elaborate than that of Hamida Banu. It consists of four elliptical panels. The first one contains the sixteenth A H century (God is great), while the last records the nine tenth regnal year of Jahangir. The corresponding year 1031 A H (1623-24 A D) is engraved in the middle of the seal, thereby the year of striking the seal and consequently a and mark in determining the ascendancy of the Empress. The second and the third panels contain a Persian version of the following regnal Persian verse:

Zehra me ruz-e-jahangir badshahi shod  
 Yag-e Nur Jahan dard-e qasbi shod

By the light of the eye of Jahangir the world  
 or the night in March the love of Empress Nur  
 Jahan became resplendent.

The Mughal princes also had their own seals. Besides the names and titles of the princes, the appellation of their father along with the years of engraving of the regnal era are found engraved in the legends of their seals. The seal of Prince Dara Shikoh (P. III

At the end, dedication to God at the top followed by the legend in Persian which means

King of the world, Muhammad Durr Shikoh, son of Emperor Shah Jahan, the holy warrior

This seal was struck in the 17th regnal year of Shah Jahan corresponding to 1666 A.H. (1666 A.D.). The title Prince Kin Bikshu, youngest son of Aurangzeb, is the name of the prince and of his father.

During the 17th century of the Grand Moghul era was a period of transition under the later Moghul emperors. The religious domination, after having been established, was emphasised by the addition of the word "The eternal seat of Akbar II has been established in the city of Agra". The religious and political aspects of the seal are of great importance for the study of the reign and of the ancestors up to Timur.

**Maratha Seals.** At the Maratha seals we come to the end of the Chhatrapati's Period and the end of the Maratha rule. The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script. The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script. The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script.

The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script. The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script. The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script.

*bhadradya rajate.*

The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script. The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script. The seal is in the Marathi language and is written in Persian script. (increases in splendour)

The Peshwa Mahadaji Rao Narayan had two seals one in Marathi the other in Persian. His Marathi seal (Pl IV No 7) is simple and bears the legend

*Shri-Rajasevita-vijayapadavata-udaya-Mahadaji*

*Rao Narayan-mukhya-pradhan*

Shri Raja Shri ha king of men treasure of joy  
Mahadaji Rao Narayan, the Prime Minister

Besides the legend we find a miniature sun and crescent moon depicted at the top. His Persian seal is more elaborate and bears a flamboyant legend which contains the title conferred on the Peshwa by the Mughal Emperor. Similarly Manaji, Sindha got engraved on his seal the title bestowed on him by Shah Alam II. Unlike that of Mahadaji Sindha the seal of Nana Faruqi (Pl IV No 8) is simple and bears the following legend in Marathi: *Shri Balaji Javardan*. The seals of other Maratha chiefs are either in Persian or Marathi and bear simple legends merely indicating their names without even the common appellation 'Bahadar'. Some of them do mention the regnal year in which they were engraved.

**Seals of the Company** For about two centuries after its establishment the East India Company acted in the name of the Mughal Emperor. Even in the first two decades of the nineteenth century it did not claim sovereignty although by that time it had emerged as a great political power. The Governor-General like other *sabhdars* had his own seal but described himself as the servant of the Mughal Emperor. He followed the convention of other Indian chiefs and had a







## PROBLEMS OF SIGILLOGRAPHY IN INDIA

Significantly, as we have just seen in the West with the system of birth control. Even today, as we have seen in the very recent birth of humanism, as the knowledge of perhaps a vast and unknown humanity has therefore become a never-ending search for the exact relation of the individual to the community, and as we find that they do not fit as neatly as we would have liked to assume. This is not very surprising, as we have seen, since we have only to recall that in working the human mind the human mind itself is not a solid object, but a usable space where the social object is, as the matrix.

**Practice.** The practice of sowing seeds in a field was not universal. In the case of the seed which was used as a model for the American tobacco grower and was regarded as an attribute of a highly skilled grower and a fine addition to the Orient and the Old West. In India seed played quite an important role throughout its recorded history. We have no early references to the practice of sowing in ancient and medieval India but have many ancient specimens of different types of seed sown seeds. With the advent

If Magna in the Indian stage we have an unbroken series of seals till under the influence of the West the seal was supplanted by signature.

**Importance of Sigillography**—The importance of sigillography is marvellous. The archivist owes a great deal to the sigillographist because for whom many a document would have remained closed books undated and undentified. It is well known that in medieval times the seal was more important than the signature. It used to be sworn to by witnesses and therefore served as a means of authentication and an unfailing guide to a identification. But this is not all. The importance of seals for the study of art cannot be overestimated. Do seals follow the same trend in art as calligraphy, iconography and so forth? Is there a substantial time lag? What is the difference in the symbology of the coins and seals? These are but a few questions on which a sigillographist would be able to provide information for the expert in art and iconography. But what is important from the historical point of view is the fact that the seal or legend which seals forth the name and style of the owner provides us with data which not only corroborates and supplements the known facts but at times alters the existing conceptions of history.

**Scope** In various parts of India small inscribed tablets of clay which were baked into terra cotta or left to harden naturally are found in large numbers. These tablets sometimes present devices only at

[illegible]

Preservation Project of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*

Refund - member has made a payment to the  
Refund and  
Punk

Figure 1









the following explanation in respectful terms as  
it state the "the following is the correct procedure"

A photograph or picture can be more communicative than words.

According to the above-mentioned position of the  
 ... the ... in case of ... the ...  
 where ... is ... I ...  
 ...  
 of the latter may be given.

4. Type  $-\overline{M}$  means the particular group of  $J$  is in  $\overline{M}$ .

Classification, q.v.

brackets

b. [unclear] If the situation is not appropriate  
for [unclear] it must be passed up to Eadon

[illegible]

8. Shape. The shape of a water sample may be either round and normal, or elongated, or triangular, or irregular shaped etc. which should be indicated accordingly in the catalogue.

is necessary

Don't see how I can  
 get any more out of you

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and their corresponding addresses. The names are: John Doe, Jane Smith, and Bob Johnson. The addresses are: 123 Main St, New York, NY 10001; 456 Elm St, New York, NY 10002; and 789 Oak St, New York, NY 10003.

the wax

1. Page - The page factor in India are very low for the same as in other countries. Same is the case with Anglo-Foreign Companies. Hence, the value of the working capital of the Indian scale is low. It is with a view to this that the working capital is low. A few more observations are as follows: It may be noted

14 ~~Scap~~ This means the style of writing known as seal-character.

It is interesting to see a modern American scientist estimating the contribution to food intake when she also takes into account the Indian and the chemical changes of

any piece according to its age. According to Abu'l Fazl, the seals of the kings like Kanar, Bar, Papal etc. produced lac which was very soft and warm when exposed to fire but gets afterwards cool and hard.

16. Colour. The colour of the seal may be mentioned. In the case of the majority of Indian seals, the colour is either black or red.

17. State of preservation. It should be clearly stated whether the state of preservation is good or bad and whether the impression is complete, damaged, broken or obliterated. If the seal is mutilated or fragmentary, the actual size of the fragment and its relation with the complete seal should roughly be indicated.

18. Method of attachment. Whether affixed directly on the document, or appended on a tongue or tag or laces. If the last be the case the colour of the laces should be noted.

This is the bare outline of a catalogue of seals. But an ideal catalogue would be one wherein seals are arranged on scientific lines as defined below in detail.

**Classification.** Seals are of various kinds and can be classified according to the material of which they are made and on which they are impressed as also the manner in which they are affixed such as (i) Clay seals. When an impression is found on clay tablets it is called a *clay seal*. (ii) Metal seals. These are technically called *balina* (Lat. *pula* a boss or circular metal plate) and they are suspended from the documents. Most of the ancient Indian seals are

1. Clay  
 2. Clay  
 3. Clay  
 4. Clay  
 5. Clay  
 6. Clay  
 7. Clay  
 8. Clay  
 9. Clay  
 10. Clay  
 11. Clay  
 12. Clay  
 13. Clay  
 14. Clay  
 15. Clay  
 16. Clay  
 17. Clay  
 18. Clay  
 19. Clay  
 20. Clay  
 21. Clay  
 22. Clay  
 23. Clay  
 24. Clay  
 25. Clay  
 26. Clay  
 27. Clay  
 28. Clay  
 29. Clay  
 30. Clay  
 31. Clay  
 32. Clay  
 33. Clay  
 34. Clay  
 35. Clay  
 36. Clay  
 37. Clay  
 38. Clay  
 39. Clay  
 40. Clay  
 41. Clay  
 42. Clay  
 43. Clay  
 44. Clay  
 45. Clay  
 46. Clay  
 47. Clay  
 48. Clay  
 49. Clay  
 50. Clay  
 51. Clay  
 52. Clay  
 53. Clay  
 54. Clay  
 55. Clay  
 56. Clay  
 57. Clay  
 58. Clay  
 59. Clay  
 60. Clay  
 61. Clay  
 62. Clay  
 63. Clay  
 64. Clay  
 65. Clay  
 66. Clay  
 67. Clay  
 68. Clay  
 69. Clay  
 70. Clay  
 71. Clay  
 72. Clay  
 73. Clay  
 74. Clay  
 75. Clay  
 76. Clay  
 77. Clay  
 78. Clay  
 79. Clay  
 80. Clay  
 81. Clay  
 82. Clay  
 83. Clay  
 84. Clay  
 85. Clay  
 86. Clay  
 87. Clay  
 88. Clay  
 89. Clay  
 90. Clay  
 91. Clay  
 92. Clay  
 93. Clay  
 94. Clay  
 95. Clay  
 96. Clay  
 97. Clay  
 98. Clay  
 99. Clay  
 100. Clay

1. Clay  
 2. Clay  
 3. Clay  
 4. Clay  
 5. Clay  
 6. Clay  
 7. Clay  
 8. Clay  
 9. Clay  
 10. Clay  
 11. Clay  
 12. Clay  
 13. Clay  
 14. Clay  
 15. Clay  
 16. Clay  
 17. Clay  
 18. Clay  
 19. Clay  
 20. Clay  
 21. Clay  
 22. Clay  
 23. Clay  
 24. Clay  
 25. Clay  
 26. Clay  
 27. Clay  
 28. Clay  
 29. Clay  
 30. Clay  
 31. Clay  
 32. Clay  
 33. Clay  
 34. Clay  
 35. Clay  
 36. Clay  
 37. Clay  
 38. Clay  
 39. Clay  
 40. Clay  
 41. Clay  
 42. Clay  
 43. Clay  
 44. Clay  
 45. Clay  
 46. Clay  
 47. Clay  
 48. Clay  
 49. Clay  
 50. Clay  
 51. Clay  
 52. Clay  
 53. Clay  
 54. Clay  
 55. Clay  
 56. Clay  
 57. Clay  
 58. Clay  
 59. Clay  
 60. Clay  
 61. Clay  
 62. Clay  
 63. Clay  
 64. Clay  
 65. Clay  
 66. Clay  
 67. Clay  
 68. Clay  
 69. Clay  
 70. Clay  
 71. Clay  
 72. Clay  
 73. Clay  
 74. Clay  
 75. Clay  
 76. Clay  
 77. Clay  
 78. Clay  
 79. Clay  
 80. Clay  
 81. Clay  
 82. Clay  
 83. Clay  
 84. Clay  
 85. Clay  
 86. Clay  
 87. Clay  
 88. Clay  
 89. Clay  
 90. Clay  
 91. Clay  
 92. Clay  
 93. Clay  
 94. Clay  
 95. Clay  
 96. Clay  
 97. Clay  
 98. Clay  
 99. Clay  
 100. Clay

1. Clay  
 2. Clay  
 3. Clay  
 4. Clay  
 5. Clay  
 6. Clay  
 7. Clay  
 8. Clay  
 9. Clay  
 10. Clay  
 11. Clay  
 12. Clay  
 13. Clay  
 14. Clay  
 15. Clay  
 16. Clay  
 17. Clay  
 18. Clay  
 19. Clay  
 20. Clay  
 21. Clay  
 22. Clay  
 23. Clay  
 24. Clay  
 25. Clay  
 26. Clay  
 27. Clay  
 28. Clay  
 29. Clay  
 30. Clay  
 31. Clay  
 32. Clay  
 33. Clay  
 34. Clay  
 35. Clay  
 36. Clay  
 37. Clay  
 38. Clay  
 39. Clay  
 40. Clay  
 41. Clay  
 42. Clay  
 43. Clay  
 44. Clay  
 45. Clay  
 46. Clay  
 47. Clay  
 48. Clay  
 49. Clay  
 50. Clay  
 51. Clay  
 52. Clay  
 53. Clay  
 54. Clay  
 55. Clay  
 56. Clay  
 57. Clay  
 58. Clay  
 59. Clay  
 60. Clay  
 61. Clay  
 62. Clay  
 63. Clay  
 64. Clay  
 65. Clay  
 66. Clay  
 67. Clay  
 68. Clay  
 69. Clay  
 70. Clay  
 71. Clay  
 72. Clay  
 73. Clay  
 74. Clay  
 75. Clay  
 76. Clay  
 77. Clay  
 78. Clay  
 79. Clay  
 80. Clay  
 81. Clay  
 82. Clay  
 83. Clay  
 84. Clay  
 85. Clay  
 86. Clay  
 87. Clay  
 88. Clay  
 89. Clay  
 90. Clay  
 91. Clay  
 92. Clay  
 93. Clay  
 94. Clay  
 95. Clay  
 96. Clay  
 97. Clay  
 98. Clay  
 99. Clay  
 100. Clay

The word "wafer" is derived from the Old English word "wæfer" which means "to break" or "to split". It is a small, thin, and flat piece of material, often used for sealing or as a token.

The word "wafer" is also used in the context of the wafer seal, which is a type of seal used in the construction of a wafer. It is a small, thin, and flat piece of material, often used for sealing or as a token.

The word "wafer" is also used in the context of the wafer seal, which is a type of seal used in the construction of a wafer. It is a small, thin, and flat piece of material, often used for sealing or as a token.

The word "wafer" is also used in the context of the wafer seal, which is a type of seal used in the construction of a wafer. It is a small, thin, and flat piece of material, often used for sealing or as a token.















paper was put over them. The seal was affixed on the knot in such a manner that the contents could not be seen. When thus sealed the *farma* was put into a golden cover. *Kanta* or *cupma* it is generally served as a receipt in all documents. The mouth of the *waraka* or *waraka* colored string and seal was affixed thereon. This proves that seals are used everywhere to authenticate a document or to close it. In most cases however the seal was used to authenticate a document which was not sealed. The Germans have adopted the term *versiegelt* for this method of attaching. Sometimes the seal was employed to authenticate as well as to close a document so as to prevent it from being read by any one except the person to whom it was addressed. In German this method is called *versiegelt*.



- Jenkins n Hiller, Art Some Notes on the Preservation of Metal and the Casting of Seals *The Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. IV
- Kennedy, J. S. *Hints for Students of History* (Seals), (London, 1920)
- Macgregor, E. *The East and the Great Mughal* (London, 1932)
- Monseigneur Fahey *Commentary*, Ed S. N. Banerjee and J. S. Hoyland
- Muhammad Khan *Al Vama-i-Jahangiri* (Calcutta 1865)
- Qureshi, I. H. *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, (Lahore, 1944)
- Rahman, B. and Ma'le H. L. *Coins, Medals and Seals of the Shahs of Iran (1500-1941)*, 1945
- Sardesai, G. S. *New History of the Marathas* Vol. I (Bombay, 1948)
- Thompson, F. M. *Art Seals Encyclopaedia Britannica*, eleventh edition.



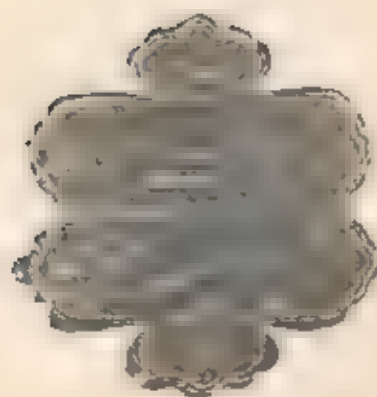
2. 5. 1. 4



8 7 8 8



1. 11. 11.



No. 4. Seal of Nur Jahan



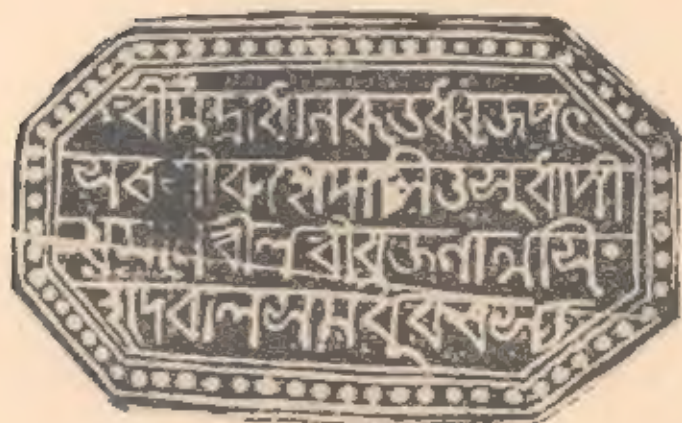


No. 6. Seal of Dara Shukoh





No. 9. Seal of Karmaleshwari Devi



No. 10. Seal of Braja Nath Sinha



No. 11. Seal of Marquis of Hastings



No. 12. Seal of Lord Bentinck



No. 13. Pendant Seal of R. Christian VIII

L27Edo.—1,000—19-2-60—GIPF.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA